



City of Seattle
Charles Royer, Mayor

King County
Tim Hill, Executive

Seattle-King County Department of Public Health

Bud Nicola, M.D., M.H.S.A., Director

Midway Landfill Health Report #5

Since the first week of March, Melissa Venskus, one of our public health nurses, has been available to the community at the Midway Information Center at 25030 Military Road South in Kent. We thought that it would be useful to update you on the types of community activities Melissa has been involved in over the past few months.

Melissa has talked with over 150 people about their specific health concerns. Many of these people were calling or visiting the Midway office to ask questions regarding claims when they first realized that someone was at the office who they could talk to about health problems. Other contacts were from people who wanted basic information about potential health risks or who were just wondering if their chronic physical problems might be attributed to exposure to landfill gases. There have also been several residents who have stopped by to get the "latest information" or just wanted to say "thanks for being here."

The major health complaints so far have been: headaches, nose bleeds, eye irritations, skin rashes and upper respiratory complaints. Upper respiratory problems included a wide range of symptoms: throat irritations, sinusitis, breathing difficulties, increased asthmatic attacks and constant rhinitis (runny nose). Other symptoms not as commonly reported were sleep difficulties, nausea, diarrhea, difficulty concentrating, irritability and increased anxiety. Many of the residents said they felt their symptoms decreased in severity or disappeared entirely when they were out of the area. Melissa has plotted the location of those households that reported symptoms on an area map. So far no particular cluster of symptoms has been reported in any one location.

In an effort to be more visible in the community, Melissa has visited the homes of several residents to discuss their situation and concerns. She has also participated in neighborhood meetings organized specifically to discuss health concerns, and has committed several hours a week to Parkside and Sunnycrest schools to answer questions or discuss concerns of the faculty, students and parents related to the landfill or health in general. She will also be working with both school nurses, Suzanne Payne (Sunnycrest) and Gale Spencer (Parkside) in reviewing the health data and statistics they have accumulated from school logs.

In addition to responding to community residents, Melissa, as well as others in the Midway office, has kept busy answering questions of the media, city council persons, legislative members and concerned citizens of the business community.

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During the next few weeks, Melissa will continue visiting schools and providing service to the community as requested. A recent request by some residents has been in the area of coping with stress. Melissa has pursued the possibility of providing stress management seminars to the community, but so far it is not clear whether this approach will best meet the needs of the community. She will continue to pursue this issue and suggests that those who are interested call the Midway office and express your concerns about this issue or any issue you feel is important to the community. Melissa can be reached at 946-4458.

UPDATE ON HEALTH SURVEY

During the past two weeks, two public health meetings were held in which Dr. Burbacher from the University of Washington discussed the Health Survey. Although attended by only a relatively few residents, several important issues and questions were addressed. Dr. Burbacher will be discussing the various details of the health survey with the community and agency representatives during the next month and will propose several options for a health survey in August. One of the most important aspects to any health survey is community involvement and support. If you have concerns or ideas regarding what issues a health survey should address, call Dr. Tom Burbacher at 545-2696. Several small community meetings are now being scheduled to discuss the health survey; your ideas are welcome.